

Norovirus - frequently asked questions

What are noroviruses?

Noroviruses are a group of viruses that are the most common cause of gastroenteritis (stomach bugs) in England and Wales. In the past, noroviruses have also been called 'winter vomiting viruses', 'small round structured viruses' or 'Norwalk-like viruses'.

How does Norovirus spread?

The virus is easily transmitted from one person to another. It can be transmitted by contact with an infected person; by consuming contaminated food or water or by contact with contaminated surfaces or objects.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms of Norovirus infection will begin around 12 to 48 hours after becoming infected. The illness is self-limiting and the symptoms will last for 12 to 60 hours. They will start with the sudden onset of nausea followed by projectile vomiting and watery diarrhoea. Some people may have a raised temperature, headaches and aching limbs. Most people make a full recovery within 1-2 days, however some people (usually the very young or elderly) may become very dehydrated and require hospital treatment.

Why does Norovirus often cause outbreaks?

Norovirus often causes outbreaks because it is easily spread from one person to another and the virus is able to survive in the environment for many days. Because there are many different strains of Norovirus, and immunity is short-lived, outbreaks tend to affect more than 50% of susceptible people. Outbreaks usually tend to affect people who are in semi-closed environments such as hospitals, nursing homes and schools.

How can these outbreaks be stopped?

Outbreaks can be difficult to control and long-lasting because Norovirus is easily transmitted from one person to another and the virus can survive in the environment. The most effective way to respond to an outbreak is to disinfect contaminated areas, to institute good hygiene measures including hand-washing and to provide advice on food handling. Those who have been infected should be isolated for up to 48 hours after their symptoms have ceased.

How is Norovirus treated?

There is no specific treatment for Norovirus apart from letting the illness run its course. It is important to drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration.

My child is suffering from Norovirus, how can I prevent others from becoming infected?

Good hygiene is important in preventing others from becoming infected – this includes thorough hand washing before and after contact. Food preparation should also be avoided until 48 hours after the symptoms have subsided.

Who is at risk of getting Norovirus?

There is no one specific group who are at risk of contracting Norovirus – it affects people of all ages. The very young and elderly should take extra care if infected, as dehydration is more common in these age groups. Outbreaks of Norovirus are reported frequently in semi-closed institutions such as hospitals, schools, residential and nursing homes and hotels. Anywhere that large numbers of people congregate for periods of several days provides an ideal environment for the spread of the disease. Childcare settings tend to be particularly affected by outbreaks of Norovirus.

How common is Norovirus?

Norovirus is not a notifiable disease so reporting is done on a voluntary basis. The Health Protection Agency only receives reports of outbreaks and we see anywhere between 130 and 250 outbreaks each year. It is estimated that Norovirus affects between 600,000 and a million people in the UK each year.

Are there any long-term effects?

No, there are no long-term effects from Norovirus.

What can be done to prevent infection?

It is impossible to prevent infection; however, taking good hygiene measures (such as frequent hand washing) around someone who is infected is important. Certain measures can be taken in the event of an outbreak, including the implementation of basic hygiene and food handling measures and prompt disinfection of contaminated areas, and the isolation of those infected for 48 hours after their symptoms have ceased.

Our Ref: Norovirus

12 September 2019

To: All Schools in Lincolnshire

Public Health
Lincolnshire County Council
Adult Care and Community Wellbeing
Public Health Division
Room 3a, 3rd Floor
Orchard House
Lincoln
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Dear Colleague

We are writing to highlight the approaching norovirus season. In recent years we have seen an increasing number of norovirus outbreaks and these cause considerable difficulties throughout the 'healthcare community'. We are therefore writing to ask for your assistance and to remind you of the importance of being vigilant for diarrhoea and vomiting (D&V) episodes/outbreaks.

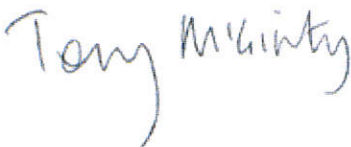
We need your help with controlling outbreaks in Schools:

Early recognition of diarrhoea and/or vomiting outbreaks in Schools is vital so that effective control measures can be put in place. If you think you have recognised an outbreak of D&V then report it promptly to the Health Protection Team on 01522 553729.

Thorough hand washing with liquid soap and water, robust environmental cleaning and prompt exclusion of affected children or staff are vital infection control measures during an outbreak of D&V within a School. Children or staff with D&V should be **excluded** from the School until they have been **symptom free for 48 hours**.

An information leaflet about Norovirus is enclosed with this letter. If you have any queries, or need to report a diarrhoea and/or vomiting outbreak, please do not hesitate to call the Health Protection Team on 01522 553729 for guidance and support.

Yours sincerely



Tony McGinty, RGN
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A norovirus Information Leaflet
A hand washing poster